(b) and (c) Indian coal, by virtue of drift origin, has high ash content and reserves of low ash content coking coal and non-coking coal is very limited in the Country and therefore, there is shortage of coking coal and low ash thermal coal which has to be imported.

Haphazard mining in Meghalaya

2888. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the town Ladrymbai in Meghalaya is sitting on a rabbit warren of crisscrossing tunnels due to haphazard mining in the town;

(b) whether it is also a fact that in the absence of a developmental plan, supportive infrastructure, knowledge and skills, communities here have engaged in uncontrolled gouging of the earth; and

(c) if so, the steps Government propose to take to prevent the social disruption and environmental devastation at Ladrymbai in Meghalaya?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (DR. DASARI NARAYANA RAO): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Preference to big companies

2889. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO:
SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT:
SHRI AJAY MAROO:

Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government would extend preferential treatment to big firms in the matter of allotment of captive coal mines;

(b) if so, the details of the policy;

(c) the reasons for deliberately being harsh to small units therefor;

(d) whether a preferential policy would create monopolies, which are sustained by Government owned mines; and

(e) the steps proposed to review the policy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (DR. DASARI NARAYANA RAO): (a) to (c) In allocation of coal blocks, the Government

have decided that preference will be accorded to the power and steel sectors. It has further been decided that preference in allocation should be given to power projects of 500 MW and above and steel plants with more than one million tonne per annum capacity.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) Does not arise in view of reply given to part (d) above.

Merger of ITI with BSNL and MTNL

2890. SHRIMATI S.G.INDIRA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some of the six units of the ITI did not have enough work and that the available orders could not be executed for want of working capital;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that a demand has been received by Government to merge the ITI with the BSNL and MTNL to overcome the problems of ITI; and

(d) if so, Government's views in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) All the six units of ITI have orders for manufacture of telecom equipments/ turnkey solutions. Due to losses and financial constraints, the company is not able to raise sufficient working capital and thereby affecting its ability to execute the orders.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. Department of Telecommunications has received a demand to merge ITI with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL). However, no synergy would be achieved by such a merger because BSNL/MTNL are service providers and ITI is a telecom manufacturing unit.

Introduction of local calls between metropolitan cities

†2891. SHRI MOTILAL VORA:
MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.